

Message Text

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44

ACTION ARA-20

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 IO-14 OMB-01 CIEP-03 CIAE-00 DODE-00

PM-07 H-03 INR-11 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-07 PA-04 RSC-01

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FM AMEMBASSY PANAMA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 1935

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TAGS: PN, PINT, PINS

SUBJ: GOP RELEASES PRISONERS IN GESTURE TO CHURCH

REF: A) PANAMA 2408 B) A-90 OF MAY 8, 1974

SUMMARY: GENERAL OMAR TORRIJOS APPROVED SATURDAY
SEPTEMBER 28 PARDONS FOR 79 PRISONERS, 70 OF WHICH WERE
CHARGED WITH COMMON CRIMES. THE OTHER NINE HAD BEEN SENTENCED
FOR CRIMES AGAINST THE SECURITY OF THE STATE.
TORRIJOS' ACTION WAS ANNOUNCED AS A RESPONSE TO POPE
PAUL'S BULL OF MAY 23 CALLING FOR "CLEMENCY AND EQUITY"
AND CAME ABOUT AFTER CORRESPONDENCE BETWEEN GENERAL TORRIJOS
AND HIGH CHURCH OFFICIALS. END SUMMARY.

1. GENERAL TORRIJOS ANNOUNCED, ACCORDING TO A PRESS REPORT,
THAT THE ACTION WAS TAKEN "IN ORDER TO SUPPORT THE HOLY
PONTIFF PAUL VI BY INCREASING NATIONAL RECONCILIATION AND
PEACE AS A CONTRIBUTION TO WORLD PEACE." POPE PAUL HAD
ANNOUNCED ON MAY 23 THE UNIVERSAL HOLY YEAR FOR 1975 AND HAD
EXPRESSED THE HOPE THAT GOVERNMENTS AROUND THE WORLD WOULD, AS
IN THE PAST, ON THE OCCASION OF THE JUBILEE WHICH OCCURS EVERY
25 YEARS, "CONSIDER THE POSSIBILITY OF ISSUING...A PARDON
WHICH WOULD SERVE AS A TESTIMONY OF CLEMENCY AND EQUITY,
IN FAVOR OF, ABOVE ALL, THOSE IMPRISONED WHO

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HAVE GIVEN SUFFICIENT PROOFS OF MORAL AND CIVIL

REHABILITATION."

2. THE PARDON FOLLOWED CORRESPONDENCE BETWEEN GENERAL TORRIJOS AND THE PANAMANIAN BISHOPS. MONSIGNOR DANIEL E. NUNEZ, BISHOP OF DAVID AND PRESIDENT OF THE PANAMANIAN EPISCOPAL CONFERENCE, WHICH WAS RECENTLY HELD IN PANAMA CITY, TOGETHER WITH ARCHBISHOP MARCOS G. MCGRATH, VICE PRESIDENT OF THE CONFERENCE, AND AUXILIARY ARCHBISHOP CARLOS A. LEWIS, SECRETARY OF THE CONFERENCE, HAD WRITTEN TORRIJOS URGING HIS CONSIDERATION OF THE POPE'S CALL FOR CHRISTIAN PARDON.

3. THE NINE POLITICAL PRISONERS TO BE RELEASED ARE AS FOLLOWS: JAIME JACOME; FELICE NAPOLITAN FEOLI; ANTONIO MOCCI MARTINEZ; BERNARDO LEMOS MEDRANO; ESTEBAN SAENZ, GIACOMO BONISSE; LUIS DE GRACIA DELIOT; MARIO CLEMENTE BERNASCHINA DIAZ, AND JUAN ANTONIO VALDESPINO. BDE NEWSPAPER NOTED THAT BERNASCHINA HAD BEEN RELEASED SEVERAL WEEKS AGO. THE NINE HAD BEEN ARRESTED EARLY THIS YEAR AND SENTENCED FOR HAVING PARTICIPATED IN SUBVERSIVE ACTIVITIES. THEY WERE MEMBERS OF THE FRENTE CIVILISTA NACIONAL AND HAD PARTICIPATED IN VARIOUS ANTI-GOP ACTIVITIES INCLUDING ADVOCACY OF THE EXECUTION OF TOP GOP OFFICIALS. (SEE PANAMA'S 2408 AND A-90). ACCORDING TO PRESS REPORTS THE NINE MEN WERE THE ONLY PRISONERS BEING HELD FOR "POLITICAL" CRIMES.

4. THE GOVERNMENT-CONTROLLED PRESS POINTED OUT THAT GENERAL TORRIJOS' HUMANITARIAN GESTURE WAS NOT BEING PARALLELED BY "MILITARY REGIMES OF THE FASCIST COURT", WHICH AT LEAST UNTIL NOW HAD IGNORED THE POPE'S PLEAS FOR CLEMENCY. THE NEWSPAPER CRITICA ALSO NOTED THAT TORRIJOS WAS OF A RELIGIOUS FAMILY WHICH HAD ALWAYS BEEN VERY ACTIVE IN THE CATHOLIC COMMUNITY TO WHICH THE IMMENSE MAJORITY OF THE PANAMANIAN PEOPLE BELONG.

5. COMMENT: THE REFERENCE IN GOP PRESS TO FACT THAT "FASCIST" REGIMES WERE NOT RELEASING POLITICAL PRISONERS WAS A REFERENCE TO RECENT PUBLIC OFFER BY CHILEAN PRESIDENT PINOCHET TO RELEASE SOME POLITICAL PRISONERS OF CUBA'S LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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CASTRO WOULD DO THE SAME. THIS BY HIS ACT OF CLEMENCY TORRIJOS IS MAKING A DISTINCTION BETWEEN HIS REGIME AND THOSE WHICH GOVERN CUBA AND CHILE. BY RESPONDING TO THE POPE'S REQUEST, TORRIJOS FOUND A CONVENIENT MECHANISM FOR EMPTYING THE JAILS OF PERSONS WHO COULD BE CLASSIFIED AS "POLITICAL PRISONERS," ALTHOUGH THEIR OFFENSES WERE CRIMINAL IN SENSE THEY WERE ADVOCATING ASSASSINATION OF GOP OFFICIALS. THE TIMING, IMMEDIATELY BEFORE OCTOBER 11,

MAY INDICATE DESIRE BY TORRIJOS TO ELIMINATE POINTS
OF FRICTION WITH CONSERVATIVES, ALTHOUGH THESE
MEN WERE MORE REPRESENTATIVE OF RIGHT WING RADICALISM
THAT OF CONSERVATIVE THOUGHT. THE CLEMENCY ACTION, INASMUCH
AS IT WAS A RESPONSE TO AN INVITATION BY THE POPE,
AND WAS PUBLICIZED AS SUCH, IS ALSO FURTHER SIGN OF
RECONCILIATION BETWEEN GOP AND CATHOLIC CHURCH.
JORDEN

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